

Land Use Pattern and Design Strategy Policies

1. The County values the rural character of the Rural Policy Area, formed by the elements of the Green Infrastructure and the working landscape, and will protect it by supporting and enhancing the rural economy, and by incorporating conservation design and regulations in the land development ordinances.
2. The County recognizes that the vitality of the rural economy and the rural way of life require the protection and enhancement of the County's Green Infrastructure. The County will protect its natural and cultural-resource base (including stream corridors, wetlands, steep slopes, ridges, mountains, working landscapes, woodlands, historic and archaeological resources, habitats, greenways, trails, reservoirs and public facilities) in order to preserve the rural character of the land and the social and experiential aspects of the rural way of life.
3. The County will protect its land resources for farming, bio-agricultural industries, vineyards, Christmas trees, forestry, nurseries, fruit and specialty vegetable production, and other innovative agricultural uses that contribute to the rural economy, as part of an overall rural economy strategy by reducing substantially the County's development density, thereby increasing the investment potential and attractiveness of agricultural land for families and businesses.
4. The County will preserve agricultural land, natural resources, open space and historic landscapes through the implementation of the Purchase of Developments Rights Program, the Agricultural and Forestal District Program, conservation-design regulations and other land use programs.
5. The County will facilitate and promote programs that support the expansion of equine-related businesses, non-traditional businesses, and direct-market rural businesses such as orchards, vineyards, nurseries, flower farms, and commercial stables, that generate rural tourism and enhance the overall rural economy while preserving rural character.
6. The County supports the creation of a variety of opportunities for rural commercial, industrial, employment, and institutional activities that preserve rural character and that are compatible with the dominant rural land use pattern in the Rural Policy Area. Rural business uses will meet established performance criteria, including traffic capacity limits, employee limits, meet site design standards (i.e., buffering, use intensity, siting, architectural features) and pose no threat to public health, safety and welfare. Appropriate uses include bed-and-breakfast enterprises, country inns, rural retreats and resorts, private camps and parks, farm markets, wayside stands, small businesses, rural corporate retreats, small corporate office and training facilities, bio-tech research facilities, private schools or medical facilities, private conference centers, meeting facilities, and similar types of uses. Where possible, such uses should locate in existing historic and /or agricultural structures.
7. The County supports its "Right to Farm" policy to protect existing farms and farmers from nuisance complaints from neighboring rural residents. The County will develop zoning standards, other legislation, and educational programs designed to reduce potential conflicts arising from the proximity of agriculture to residential development.
8. The County supports the Rural Policy Area as a permanent rural landscape, a unique composite of natural and man-made environments, farms and forestal areas, natural areas and wildlife habitats, villages, and hamlets. The County will permit development in the Rural Policy Area that promotes opportunities for the expansion of rural economic uses, open space, farms, historic and natural areas, forests, the Green Infrastructure, and protects the rural character of the landscape.

The equine industry is a major component of the rural economy in Loudoun.

The Rural Economy

The preservation and enhancement of the rural economy is a central focus of the rural strategy. The Rural Policy Area's land base supports a wide array of agricultural enterprises, as well as the majority of the County's local tourist attractions, wineries, small retail and service establishments, home-based businesses, and some light industry. This kind of broad-based rural economy has been a net-revenue generator for the County because tax revenues generally exceed expenditures for rural populations. The County recognizes its fiscal responsibility to protect the land resource for the rural economy, to provide fundamental protection for rural businesses, to ensure prudent fiscal management of limited public resources and to provide needed protection of the public health and safety.

The Rural Policy Area enterprises include crop and cattle production, the equine industry, vineyards, wineries, specialty farm products such as Christmas trees, farm stands, fruits, vegetables, flowers, herbs, dairy products, locally produced organic food products. Visitor experiences such as farm tours, picnic areas, nature trails, hayrides, pony rides, animal petting areas, pond fishing, and arts and crafts sales are also important elements of the rural economy. Farm-supportive businesses in the area include blacksmiths, veterinarians, farm equipment and feed stores. Commercial enterprises dependent on the area's rural atmosphere include bed-and-breakfast inns, corporate retreats, camps and lodges.

These rural enterprises are land based, and their survival depends on what happens to that valuable resource. The 1998 report, "The 200,000-Acre Solution," recognized this symbiotic relationship, stating that "unless the best, most appropriate land is reserved for rural enterprises, in part by curtailing residential development, there can be neither sustainability of the current rural economy nor growth of its various components." That report by the Rural Economic Development Task Force called on the County to preserve the rural economy's natural resource base, and the Board of Supervisors, in adopting the document, called protection of the rural area its top priority.

The equine industry is a major component of the rural economy. It is the largest agricultural employer in Loudoun County, and its barns, stables, and rolling pastureland are valuable components of the Rural Policy Area's unique character. The Marion du Pont Scott Equine Medical Center, near Leesburg, is one of the nation's leading veterinary research, teaching, and treatment centers. The Virginia Tech Middleburg Agriculture Research (MARE) center which is dedicated to horse forage research and established in 1949 is partially located in Loudoun. In addition, Loudoun County is home to several major equine associations, including the Virginia Horseman's Association, the American Academy of Equine Arts, the National Sporting Library, Chronicle of the Horse, Middleburg Training Center, the Masters of Foxhounds Association of America, and the U.S. Combined Training in Leesburg. The equine industry should be afforded the same benefits and encouragement extended to other forms of local agriculture. This industry has also felt the effects of growth and development. Several Loudoun-based equine events are no longer held in Loudoun because of the lack of facilities (e.g., the Middleburg Classic Horse Show and the Loudoun Pony Show). The preservation of personal and commercial equestrian pursuits is important to maintaining the rural character that makes Loudoun County a beautiful place to live and to visit.

The success of the rural tourism industry depends on the preservation and enhancement of the County's rural character, specifically its natural and cultural resource base. Most of the attractions that draw tourists to the County are located in the Rural Policy Area and the area's unique sense of place and nostalgia enhance the authentic rural experience. Primary attractions in the policy area are the historic Towns with their restaurants, specialty shops, and festivals; other historic sites; Christmas tree farms and other farms that market directly to consumers; wayside stands; wineries; plant nurseries; bed-and-breakfast inns; and recreational activities and special events. Bed-and-breakfasts alone account for \$4.5 million a year in

tourist dollars. However, there is room for expansion in this and in other sectors of the tourism industry. With so much untapped potential, rural Loudoun should be seen as ripe for investment and reinvestment.

The County recognizes that traditional farming is in decline. This classification of land in the County declined from 206,600 acres in 1987 to 184,988 in 1997 according to the U.S. Census of Agriculture. The number of individual farms grew during the period from 934 to 1,032 but farming was the principal occupation of fewer than 40 percent of those occupying the land and only 5 percent of the farms yielded annual sales in excess of \$100,000. Nevertheless, the Plan seeks to encourage the retention of traditional farming through fiscal and other incentives.

The county's rural economy and rural tourism depend on the preservation and enhancement of its natural and cultural resource base.

In addition to protecting the land resource, the County will undertake several initiatives to enhance the rural economy in the coming years. As explained in the following policies, some of that support will be in the form of tax incentives and streamlined regulations. The rest will be through the creation of new programs and services to support this valuable component of Loudoun's economy.

Rural Economy Policies

1. The County will foster and expand the diversity and richness of the rural economy through a variety of policy, regulatory, incentive-based, and programmatic approaches and will protect the rural resource base, including open, farmable land; all elements of the Green Infrastructure; historic and agricultural structures; and the rural character features necessary to advance the rural economy.
2. The County supports its rural tourism industry through the preservation and enhancement of the County's unique rural character, specifically its Green Infrastructure and cultural resource base and will protect this rural character to help to achieve the County's economic, as well as social and environmental goals.
3. The County will support the rural economy by facilitating the development of rural businesses that are compatible in scale, use, and intensity with the rural environment and preserve large areas of land to be used for agriculture, forestry, and viticulture. The Zoning Ordinance will include innovative types of agricultural uses. New programs and amendments to the Zoning Ordinance will permit flexibility in the sale of farm products and related auxiliary products, provide more alternatives to promote rural tourism; and provide opportunities for rural conference or retreat centers, private camps and parks, and similar kinds of low intensity, rural land uses subject to the capacity of rural roads, groundwater, and limited employment generation.
4. The County will allow a range of on-farm uses by right on working farms to allow a rural property-owner access to additional sources of income to supplement revenue from agricultural products, subject to performance criteria. Such uses will include small businesses that are a logical extension of the farm use, including farm product sales and services related to agriculture (i.e., farm co-ops, wayside stands, welding services, farm machinery repair, rental and leasing), to provide economical and convenient services to the rural economy, and to provide for the operation of home-based businesses that are compatible with the rural landscape. Such uses will be compatible in scale, size, and intensity with the primary agricultural use and the rural environment, and will be subject to performance standards.
5. The County will help increase available capital for the expansion and/or upgrade of farm operations by

working with community banks to develop an agricultural linked-deposits program.

6. The County will facilitate the expansion of rural hospitality businesses, such as bed and breakfasts and country inns, which preserve the rural character while offering services that support rural tourism.
7. The County will prepare an expedited special-exception process at reduced costs for certain uses in the Rural Policy Area, if feasible.
8. The County supports the development of businesses necessary to support the County's agricultural and equine industry, including agricultural equipment sales, rental, and repair services, veterinary services, product storage, and seed supply.
9. The County recognizes both the commercial and recreational equine industry as a fundamental component of the rural economy and will promote its expansion. County ordinances will be amended to reflect the current practices and needs of the industry.
10. The County will encourage an environment supportive of the ownership and boarding of horses, for both commercial and recreational use, by promoting land development practices that preserve large tracts of land appropriate for grazing, growing hay, and riding horses. The County will also provide tax incentives such as expanding the Land Use Tax Program to include all sectors of the equine industry.
11. The County will facilitate public accessibility to recreational equine activities and participation in the equine industry by establishing a trail network, show ring, cross country course, exercise ring, or other related features in at least one County park. These activities may be supported through partnerships with nonprofit entities such as the 4-H program and the private sector.
12. Because the expansion of equestrian activities in the County is dependent on having expansive, pleasant places to ride, the County will encourage rural development proposals to provide easements for the creation of an equestrian trail network. The backbone of this trail network will be the W&OD Trail and planned trails that will be funded through a range of public and private contributions.
13. The County will seek to expand Agricultural and Forestal District eligibility to include acreage used for equine-related activities, such as stables, training and racing facilities, and breeding farms.
14. New non-rural commercial uses that are not compatible with the dominant agricultural land use pattern will be allowed to locate only in the Towns. The County may permit non-agriculturally related commercial uses by special exception in the Rural Policy Area if the use is agriculturally and rurally compatible in scale and intensity, poses no threat to public health, safety and welfare, and if the use helps to preserve farmland and open space and continue agricultural operations.
15. The County will modify the by right and special exception uses provided in the Rural Commercial zoning district to those appropriate to the rural land use policies of this plan. The County will also evaluate and inventory existing commercial districts to determine consistency with the objectives for commercial services in the Rural Policy Area with attention to permitted and special exception uses, the mix of uses, scale, adherence to the traditional street pattern and design and building footprint and set-backs. Such an assessment may result in the County re-mapping these properties in accordance with this Plan.
16. Existing non-conforming commercial, industrial, and institutional uses in the Rural Policy Area may be expanded by special exception if the use and proposed expansion are small scale, agriculturally based, pose no serious threat to public health or safety, and meet applicable performance standards.
17. Expansions to existing institutional uses will be permitted in the Rural Policy Area if the proposed

expansion is compatible with neighboring uses and poses no serious public health or safety problems and if the necessary infrastructure and supporting or ancillary activities can be provided cost-effectively.

18. Golf courses in rural areas will be permitted only by Special Exception.

Rural Economy Incentive Policies

1. The County will provide local-government resources such as technical assistance, research, educational programs, and support of committees to help promote and expand the rural economy, and seek rural entrepreneurs to locate in western Loudoun.
2. The County will establish incentive programs to protect and enhance the rural economy.
3. The County will aid in the establishment of rural conservation service districts by a super majority of property-owners within such districts. Property-owners will pay a special tax that will be used to fund or match County funds appropriated for the Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program.
4. Use Value Assessment ("land use") and other existing agricultural programs (such as Agricultural and Forestal Districts), amended and updated as necessary, will be used to assist in maintaining the viability of farming in Loudoun County. Additional voluntary agricultural conservation programs will be designed and implemented to maintain and strengthen the rural economy and rural character of Loudoun County. In addition, the County will explore all available incentives to retain and encourage agricultural activities.
5. The County will evaluate and if necessary amend the Use Value Assessment Program. The County will consider amendments that may include the addition of the following:
 - a. Woodlands, stream valleys, meadowland, flood-ways, and wetlands and the other natural components of the Green Infrastructure as qualifying uses for reduced real property tax rates;
 - b. The elimination of roll-back real property taxes on the part of a cluster development that remains in a qualifying land use;
 - c. The dedication of roll-back real property taxes to the PDR program;
 - d. Allow land used for equine operations as a qualifying use for a lowered real property tax rate, regardless of whether or not it produces a product for sale;
 - e. A reduction in land use-related tax rates;
 - f. A reduction in the roll-back period, if the change in land use involves a cluster development or a rural commercial use, and significant open land is preserved;
 - g. An increase in roll-back period for standard development that does not save open land; and
 - h. Making farm-worker tenant dwelling land eligible for the Use Value Assessment program if it meets the Uniform Statewide Building Code.
6. The County will first study and where appropriate seek changes in the State Code to reduce real property taxes in certain circumstances conducive to the objectives of the County's rural strategy. These include the following: tax credits on farm-related capital improvements; tax abatement or deferral when a farmer makes an investment in high-value crops that do not turn a profit for several years (orchards, Christmas trees, vineyards, etc.); assessment of tenant housing on farms below residential market value; additional reduction in the real estate tax rate on rurally zoned property that is

- under permanent conservation easement; and a reduction in the personal property tax for farm vehicles.
7. The County will use public funds to purchase easements on farms that have prime agricultural soils, historic buildings and sites in a rural setting and other elements of the Green Infrastructure as part of a comprehensive open-space preservation program.
 8. The County will explore and pursue all available federal, state, and local options for acquiring conservation easements at full price, bargain sale, charitable gift, installment purchase, lease/purchase, strategic re-sale of eased land, real estate transfer tax, and conservation credit card.
 9. The County will study and if feasible aid in the establishment of a conservation foundation whose main purposes are to educate landowners about the income and estate tax benefits of conservation easement donation, to accept donations to support the County's PDR program, and to develop a network of charitable creditors and conservation-oriented buyers to guarantee loans and to purchase eased property.
 10. The County will continue to seek enabling legislation to implement a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program.
 11. The County will establish a coordinated service approach to assist rural landowners in the review and development of alternatives to preserve the agricultural potential on individual farms, coordinate a rural design service, and assist in filing applications, which support agricultural uses in the Rural Policy Area.

Despite other development options the uniform 3-acre lot subdivision remained the favored development pattern over the past decade.

12. County departments will work with the Loudoun Convention and Visitors Association to promote rural tourism, including: the marketing of rural tourist businesses, the production of brochures high-lighting vineyards, farmers' markets, wayside stands and pick-your-own operations; tourism events such as farm tours; the promotion of historic and rural overlay districts, non-traditional and direct market businesses for their tourism value; and the tourism efforts of the incorporated Towns.
13. The County will facilitate effective distribution of local agricultural products and encourage the growth of the market for local products. The following are examples of such initiatives:
 - a. Facilitate physical improvements to support the farm community, such as farmers' markets, a product distribution center and produce cooler by providing county-owned land for location;
 - b. Analyze market research on high-value agricultural products, ancillary farm businesses, and other rural economic uses such as farm resorts, retreats, and country inns;
 - c. Develop and expand, in conjunction with the Loudoun Convention and Visitors Association, brand identification of Loudoun farm products;
 - d. Facilitate "red-tape" problems, processing questions, and other identified regulatory obstacles.
 - e. Advise and promote products to Loudoun-based businesses.
14. The County will form a public/private Rural Economic Development Council comprised of rural industry sector leaders. This organization will:
 - a. Link governmental, non-governmental, and regional organizations;
 - b. Coordinate state and federal farm assistance programs;

- c. Receive and make grants;
 - d. Act as an advocacy group for rural issues;
 - e. Promote activities that nurture the rural economy.
15. The County will assist in accomplishing the following:
- a. Establish joint marketing efforts, equipment buying programs, central farm product distribution systems and facility management;
 - b. Market specialized Loudoun products in order to support the creation and expansion of alternative rural land based businesses and promote a diversity of agricultural products;
 - c. Maintain and provide access to the land lease data base;
 - d. Develop and maintain a community supported agriculture concept that provides for the direct sale of farm products between farmers and local consumers including local restaurants and retailers;
 - e. Develop and maintain a rural electronic data bank; and
 - f. Assist in sharing labor and transportation resources.
16. The County will evaluate the potential for and, if appropriate, establish a "farm viability enhancement program" in conjunction with an appropriate state or local agency.
17. The County will endorse and support rural community events such as festivals, vineyard fairs, and farm and garden tours as a means of showcasing the rural economy, strengthening the economic vitality of towns, and promoting the rural experience.
18. The County will invest in such marketplace incentives as may reasonably be determined to encourage rural entrepreneurs to locate in Western Loudoun. Further, the County will adopt a set of supporting regulations and ordinances designed to enhance the effectiveness of those incentives.
19. The County will facilitate a robust rural economy by revising its Zoning Ordinance to expand permitted by-right nonresidential uses in the rural area, subject to performance and location criteria. Examples of such uses could include new equestrian centers and boarding facilities, additional vineyards and wineries, event facilities, nurseries, conference centers, corporate retreats and training facilities, telecommuting facilities, heritage and rural tourism destinations, truck farms and farmers markets, agricultural biotech startups, bed and breakfasts, restaurants, and related service firms.
20. The County will study the feasibility of organizing agricultural cooperatives.

